

WILDLIFE HARVEST AND POPULATION STATUS REPORT RING-NECKED PHEASANT – 2009

**Thomas V. Dailey
Resource Scientist**

2008 PHEASANT HUNTING SEASON

Pheasant hunting activity is estimated using a post-season mail survey sent to holders of Missouri's hunting permits that allow hunting of small game (resident small game permit, non-resident small game permit, daily small game permit, lifetime hunting permit, hunt/fish combination permit, etc.). Of approximately 214,000 permit holders, 9,000 were sent surveys, and about 43% returned completed surveys.

For the 2008 season (November 1, 2008 to January 15, 2009), we estimate there were 6,777 pheasant hunters, a 20% decline from the 2007 season (8,493 hunters) and a 47% decline from the average for the previous 10 years (1998–2007; 12,788 hunters)(Figure 1). Pheasant hunters in 2008 killed 17,662 pheasants, an 18% decrease from the 2007 season, and a decline of 48% from the average for the previous 10 years (1998–2007; 34,000 harvest). Estimates of reported harvest by zoogeographic regions (regions depicted in Figure 2a) for 2008 were 5,294 pheasants (3,139 hunters) for the Northwestern Prairie, 2,029 pheasants (1,623 hunters) for the Northern Riverbreaks, and 9,664 pheasants (1,754 hunters) for the Northeastern Riverbreaks. For the Mississippi Lowlands, the survey did not detect any pheasant hunting activity (i.e., none of the small game hunters in the survey indicated they 'hunted most' in a county in that region). Note that the precipitous decline in pheasant hunting has occurred despite the expansion in 2005 of the north hunting zone from Missouri state highway 36 south to Interstate 70.

Beginning in 2007, Missouri has provided the weekend before November 1st as a youth-only hunt for quail and pheasants, with pheasant hunting limited to the north zone. Based on responses to the mail survey, we estimate that 1,408 adults took a youth bird hunting during the special youth weekend held October 25–26, 2008.

2009 POPULATION SURVEYS

The Agents' Roadside Survey measures the number of pheasants observed along 72 standardized 30-mile routes during August 1–15 and provides a fairly reliable predictor of fall pheasant harvest. The 2009 Agents' August survey revealed that Missouri's pheasant population continues to dwindle. The 2009 statewide count of 0.64 pheasants per 30-mile route was down 15% compared to 2008, down 66% compared to the previous 5-year average (2004–2008), and 67% lower compared to the 10-year average (1999–2008; Table 1). By zoogeographic regions, counts were up substantially in the Northwestern Prairie (1.94 pheasants/30-mile route) and in the Western Prairie (0.67 pheasants/30-mile route), but counts were very low in the other 3 regions (Table 1). Data categorized by Missouri Department of Conservation regions are shown in Table 2.

The record low count of pheasants reflects a multitude of factors. Pheasants thrive in Great Plains states where grasslands dominate the landscape, but Missouri lacks such huge expanses of grassland. Thus, it is not surprising that our effort to establish pheasants has been marginally successful. Pheasants are not alone in their downward population trend, however, with most of Missouri's ground-nesting birds (e.g., quail, wild turkeys, prairie-chickens, migratory birds) experiencing poor production the last few years because of wet and cool nesting-season weather and a long-term decline due to dwindling habitat. For open-land species such as quail and pheasants, a prominent habitat decline is occurring as hundreds of thousands of

acres of suitable habitat in the Conservation Reserve Program are being converted back to monocultures of corn, soybeans and wheat.

There are efforts underway to remedy various habitat deficiencies, including MDC initiatives and partnerships to restore quail, prairie-chicken, and songbird habitat, all of which can benefit pheasants. Key partners include Pheasants/Quail Forever, Quail Unlimited, and the National Wild Turkey Federation. MDC is also participating in the development of a National Pheasant Conservation Plan, under the auspices of the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

HUNTING PROSPECTS

Prospects for the 2009 pheasant hunting season are poor with the exception of northwest Missouri. Hunting regulations for pheasants remain unchanged, with seasons in the north zone (daily bag limit 2; possession limit 4) running from October 24–25 for the youth season, and November 1 to January 15 for the regular season. In the southeast zone, pheasant hunting runs December 1–12 and the daily and possession limits are one. Because pheasant harvest is limited to males, hunting has little impact on long-term population trends.

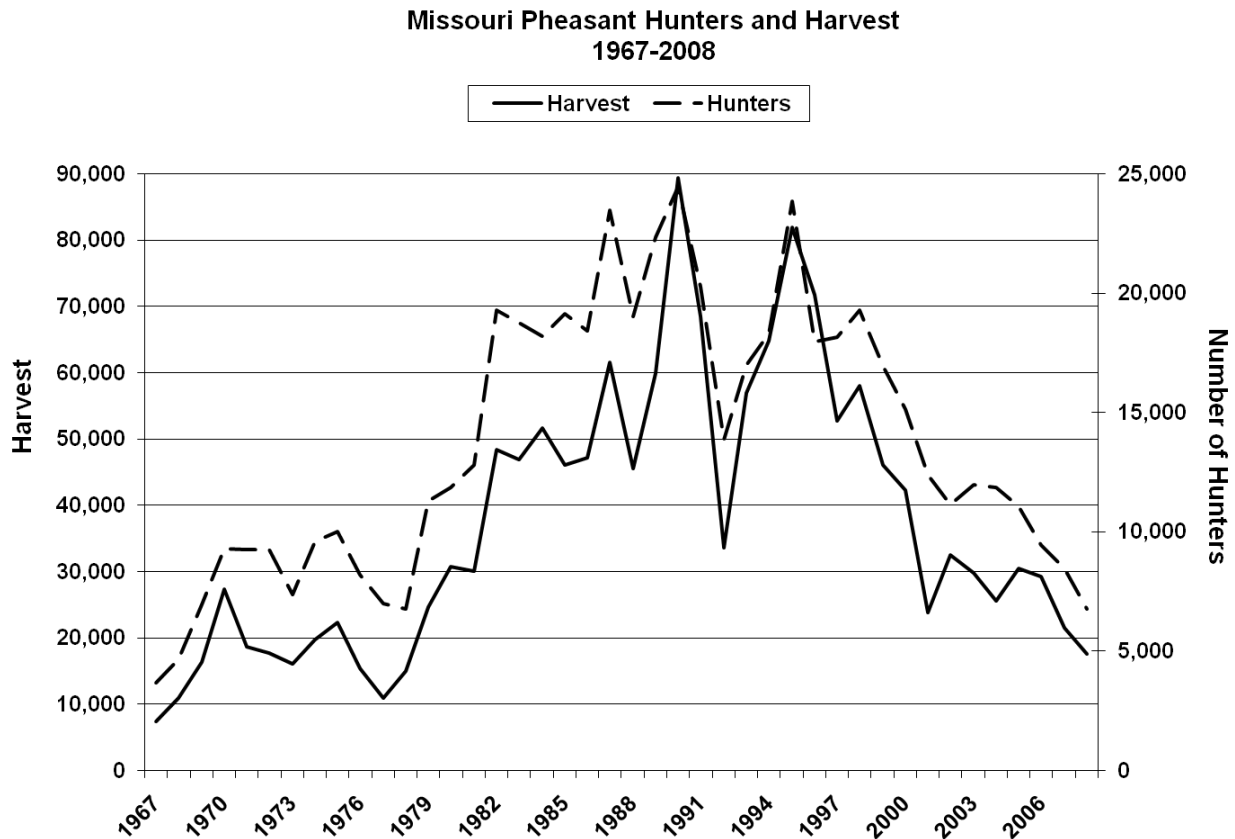


Figure 1. Number of ring-necked pheasant hunters and harvest estimated by the small-game post-season harvest mail survey (1967–2008). Includes hunters who checked that they hunted most in counties of the state where hunting of wild ring-necked pheasant hunting is allowed, including the Northwestern Prairie, Northern Riverbreaks, Northeastern Riverbreaks and Mississippi Lowlands zoogeographic regions (Figure 2a).



Figure 2a. Zoogeographic regions of Missouri.

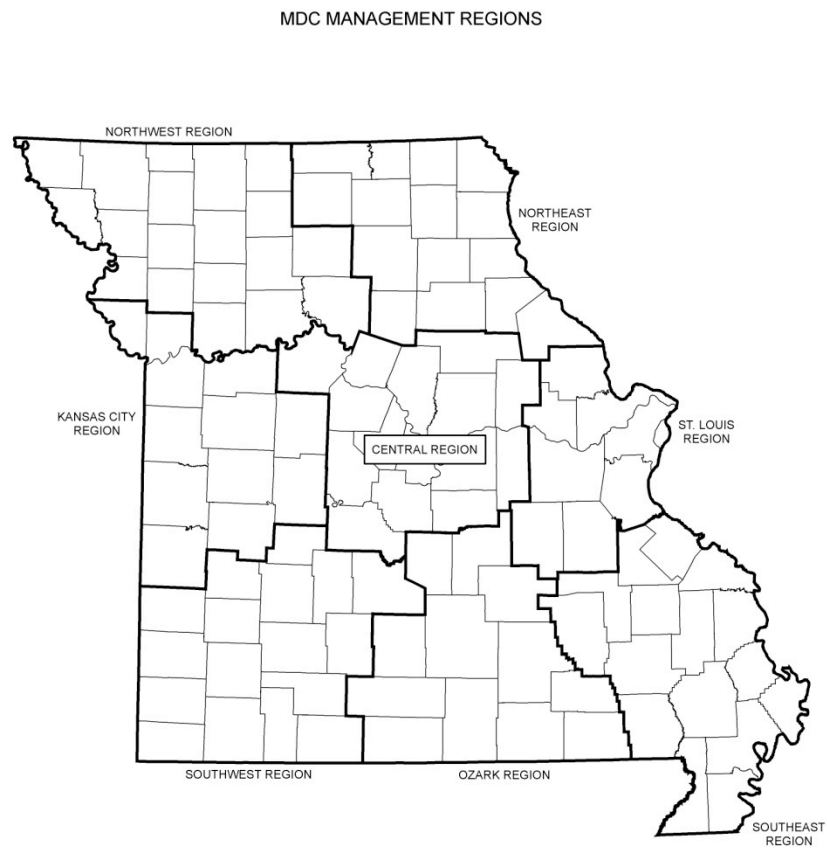


Figure 2b. Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) regions.

Table 1. The number of all pheasants observed along 30-mile routes during August 1–15, 2009 by zoogeographic regions (see Figure 2a), and relative change through time.

Zoogeographic regions (routes)	2009 Index	2-year (2008-2009) % change	5-year (2004-2008) % change	10-year (1999-2008) % change
Northwestern Prairie (18)	1.94	146	-40	-40
Northern Riverbreaks (21)	0.29	-74	-81	-84
Northeastern Riverbreaks (24)	0.13	-82	-93	-92
Western Prairie (3)	0.67	*	-38	-54
Mississippi Lowlands (6)	0.00	*	*	*
STATEWIDE (72)	0.64	-15	-66	-67

*Percent change not computed because of zero in numerator or denominator.

Table 2. The number of all pheasants observed along 30-mile routes during August 1–15, 2009 by Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) regions (see Figure 2b) and relative change through time.

MDC regions (routes)	2009 Index	2-year (2008-2009) % change	5-year (2004-2008) % change	10-year (1999-2008) % change
Northwest (33)	1.24	11	-54	-57
Northeast (26)	0.12	-82	-93	-92
Kansas City (3)	0.00	*	*	*
Central (4)	0.50	*	-49	-56
Southeast (6)	0.00	*	*	*

*Percent change not computed because of zero in numerator or denominator.